15.0.7
5651

Christian Imitation.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH

OF

MRS. NANCY LAY,

WESTBROOK, CT.

BY WILLIAM A. HYDE, Pastor.

MAY 30th, 1852.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

HARTFORD:
PRINTED BY DAVID B. MOSELEY.
1852.

Christian Imitation.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH

OF

MRS. NANCY LAY,

WESTBROOK, CT.

BY WILLIAM A. HYDE, Pastor.

MAY 30th, 1852.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

HARTFORD:
PRINTED BY DAVID B. MOSELEY.
1852.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Boston Regional Library System

http://www.archive.org/details/christianimitati00hyde

SERMON.

And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end ; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.—Heb. vi. 11, 12.

Man is an *imitative* being. An inclination to follow, more or less, in the ways of others, is seen in every stage of his progress, from the cradle to the grave. The infant early begins to imitate the motions of a fond mother. Children and youth are seen imitating the ways of each other, as well as of those in more advanced life. And the adult, in a multitude of ways, exhibits the same propensity.

On either hand, then, we see something of this disposition to imitate. It seems to be almost universal. And it may be productive, either of good, or evil.

Now God, in his holy word, is ever aiming to give this inclination the best direction. He would always have men follow that which is good, and not evil.

And from such a desire springs the earnest exhortation, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which good." He then exhibits himself as a *perfect* standard for our imitation—and as the *only* perfect standard. He reveals his own glorious and heaven-admired character, as worthy of all admiration; and then he issues his broad and most reasonable requirements to all his intelligent creatures to imitate his character. His kind and condescending language is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "Be ye followers of God, as dear children."

Now our heavenly Father is here making no demands which we are incapable of rendering. He has given us ample ability to do all that he requires. Others have done it, and so may we. Noah was a just man, and walked with God; and Enoch also had the same divine commendation. Abraham followed God in the ways of his holy commands. Caleb and Joshua wholly followed the Lord. Of David, the Lord says, "he kept my commandments, and followed me with all his heart." Daniel was greatly beloved of God, because he followed his commands. And in later times, we find Zachariah and Elizabeth walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. We find Stephen, full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost—a devoted follower of God; and Peter, obeying God rather than men, and Paul ever zealous in doing God's will. And there were many others besides the apostles who

followed God, and through faith and patience were inheriting the promises. And in every succeeding age of the church have been found those who were followers of God, as dear children. We have seen some such in our own beloved Zion. Their names are dear—their memory blessed.

And not only does our Heavenly Father exhibit himself as a perfect standard for our imitation; but when our blessed Savior appeared on earth, he also exhibited himself as a perfect pattern of all moral excellence, and called upon all his followers to imbibe his Spirit, and walk in his holy footsteps. His just requirement of the humble fishermen of Galilee was, "follow me." And he not only required this of his disciples, but of all others. He says, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." He also says, "If any man will serve me, let him follow me."

And not only is God, our Heavenly Father, and Christ, our Redeemer, here set forth as examples for us to follow; but also the *church*, and the faithful people of God. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God, which, in Judea, are in Christ Jesus." "And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost; so that *ye* were *ensamples* to all that believe."

And he not only acknowledges these Christians as followers of himself, and of the Lord, and as examples to others; but he earnestly exhorts all others thus to follow. In language of strong entreaty he says, "I

beseech you, be ye followers of me." And again he adds, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

In the text, he speaks of faithful saints who have entered upon their blessed and promised reward; and says, be followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. They are set before you as an example, worthy to be diligently followed. Some around you are diligent in their Christian work; and we desire that *every one* of you do show the *same* diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end—the end of life, or till death.

Thus explained, this Scripture presents for our consideration *the importance of diligently following the faithful and accepted Christian.*

I say *accepted*—for it is evident that those referred to in the text were accepted and rewarded. But, can we know who of the professed followers of Christ are thus accepted and rewarded? We do not know, in all cases, who are received to heaven to inherit the promises. But this Scripture evidently implies that some are so faithful, consistent, and devoted, and exhibit such evidence of a holy life, that we have no doubts respecting them. We feel the fullest assurance that they do inherit the promises. Such we are exhorted to follow.

The most weighty reasons are at hand for such imitation. A few of them we will mention.

1. It is the earnest desire of God, the Savior, and all holy beings.

It is not solely the desire of the Apostle, expressed in the text; for, says he, *we* desire it--meaning himself and his fellow Apostles. Neither is it these alone; for their holy desires sprung from God, the great fountain of all holy feeling. They expressed it as a desire, which was the offspring of God, and which he had wrought in them by his Holy Spirit.

God has everywhere in his word expressed the same great desire that his people should imitate holiness both in himself and in his most devoted children. He has given us his holy law,--the transcript of his glorious character, to be our guide in the way of holiness. He has placed before us a perfect pattern, and the nearer we imitate it the more shall we conform to his earnest desire.

When first converted from the ways of sin to the love and service of God, we are new-created in righteousness and true holiness. Then he requires us diligently to pursue the path of holiness--to drink deep and of its heavenly spirit--and to grow in all the Christian graces, "to the end that he may stablish our hearts unblameable in holiness." We may be surprised to find how much is contained in scripture, of this same tenor, to urge on the Christian in the imitation of God. He has first "called us to holiness," and then exhorts us "to continue in faith and holiness." He desires that his children should be, "in behavior as becometh holiness—that they should be partakers of his holiness--and that they should perfect this holiness in the fear of God. How many similar expressions of his desire are constantly oc-

curing in his word to remind us of the great object of the Christian life! In every age of the world he has made the same great demand of his people. He made it of his ancient Israel, in this striking and forcible language. "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." He made it of his people in the days of the prophets, from the fervid entreaty of Isaiah, "O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord," to the closing words of Malachi, discerning between him who thus serves God, and him who does not. He made it in the ushering in of the gospel dispensation, when our Savior, in his first recorded discourse, enjoined upon his disciples, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." He made it by the mouth of his apostle who said, "follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." He makes the same demand now, in the soul-stirring language of the text; and will continue to make it till we are ripened for glory.

Such is also the great desire of our Savior. He says, in all kindness and condescension, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest to your souls." To guide every willing soul, he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." All his precious instructions are designed to lead his people to follow him. All his faithful warnings are against departures from him. All his holy and harmless life is a perfect example

for our imitation. Such imitation will most honor God, will most benefit our fellowmen, will best fit us for life, and best fit us for death, and the blessed presence of our Savior in heaven. "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps."

Such is also the desire of the holy angels. They are the ministering spirits of God, and are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." They take a deep and lively interest in all that pertains to the redemption of man. They view, with inquiring delight, the gracious plan of salvation. They speed their way with surprising alacrity and joy on their errands of mercy. They rejoice over every repenting sinner, and take every departing and sanctified soul and convey it to mansions of eternal rest.

Such was the ardent desire of the faithful apostles, as expressed so fully in the text. "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." How do all their epistles abound with earnest exhortations to a diligent imitation of the faithful in Christ Jesus?—They urge, by every motive, to such efforts. They entreat the people of God, by their example, by their own salvation, by the mercies of God, and by the great sacrifice of Christ, to lead a holy life. And

with what joy do they commend such a life. Paul says to the church at Rome, "I thank my God, through Jesus Christ, for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." And to the Thessalonians he says, "ye are our glory and joy."

And such is also the desire of every faithful minister of Christ. "They watch for your souls, as they that must give account." And they would gladly give their account of you with *joy*, and not with grief. They would rejoice to be able to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. They wish you to give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. They urge you to run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus. They long to see you all manifest such readiness and fidelity in every Christian duty; such benevolent zeal in the cause of Christ; such a holy spirit and temper of mind, and such a consistent and blameless and fruitful life, that when you leave your earthly toils, they may have the joyful assurance that you are going to inherit the promises. They long to see you manifest such a holy and godly life, that when dead, you may be remembered with joy, and be an example worthy the diligent imitation of all that survive. They long to see you so conformed to the spirit and image of Christ, that you may be "living epistles, known and read of all men."

2. Such a diligent imitation of the Savior and his devoted people, will recommend religion to the world around.

Those who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises, have thus recommended religion to the world in their lives and in their deaths. They have left behind them the sweet savor of a Christian name and influence; and now that they are dead, they yet speak—speak by their example, their consistent walk, their zealous and cheerful effort to do good, their deep interest in the welfare of Zion, their fervent prayers and their pious counsels.

So will all who diligently follow them, thus recommend religion. Their bright example will shine that others may see their good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Their pious zeal will be seen in all their efforts to do good to a perishing world. Their benevolent acts will help to swell that noble stream which bears on its bosom the way of life and salvation to the benighted and perishing. Their ardent and persevering prayers will rise up to the throne of grace to be richly laden with blessings to be showered upon a sinful world. Their love for souls, and their anxious desire for their salvation will prompt to fidelity and devotedness in every duty. And their love to Christ will be the crowning and all-constraining motive. Blessed is that servant whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing! And O, how blessed is the influence of such devoted Christians! We love to feel it as we review their lives. We love to see this blessed influence exerted upon others. We love to recall their memory; we will carry it with us to the throne of

grace, and humbly pray that we may be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

3. Such a diligent imitation of the Savior and his faithful people will give us sure and joyful evidence of a preparation for heaven.

This is more than implied in the language of the text. And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end. The original word, here rendered *full assurance,* signifies a strong and undoubted persuasion. It expresses the fullest conviction, where no doubt is left. This confident hope of heaven is obtained by diligence and perseverance in a holy life, and only in this way. It is not by dreams and visions and impulses, but by a life devoted to the service of God. Where there is this close imitation of the faithful in Jesus which this scripture requires, there will be this full and joyful assurance of hope. It will be felt and known to be a good hope through grace. It will be as an anchor to the soul. Its blessedness will be felt here, and it will abide with the faithful even to the end. It will impart joy and rich consolation to the devoted child of God. It will be his sure support in trial and affliction. It will be his safe refuge in distress. It will soften his dying pillow; remove the sting of death, and light up a smile of joy in his departing hour. It will fill the soul with holy triumph as it descends the dark valley,

and prepare it for the reception of that angelic band which will convey it with raptures of joy to the presence of the blessed Savior and Redeemer.

4. Such an imitation of the Savior and his faithful ones, will secure the blessed inheritance of the promises.

That rich and invaluable inheritance is already purchased and prepared at an infinite expense. It is the promised reward to all the faithful children of God. These promises are exceeding rich and precious. To inherit them will be the full fruition of all our highest hopes. They are all made certain by the oath of him who made them. "For when God made promise to Abraham because he could swear by no greater, he swear by himself, saying, surely blessing I will bless thee." And in this we find that "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." To gain the object of this blessed hope is the grand aim of every devoted follower of Christ. And to imitate him, and those who bear most of his holy image, will secure that aim. This is the road that all others have taken to inherit the promises; and to follow them, will be sure to lead us to the same blessed inheritance.

If to be a follower of the rich in this world, would secure the inheritance of their possessions, how

closely would they be followed in all their ways and plans! But here is an inheritance which can supply the highest wants of the immortal soul forever; and it will never diminish, or waste away. It is in reserve for the faithful—ready to be bestowed. Do you long for this rich and unfailing inheritance? Would you diligently seek for it? Will you earnestly labor to obtain it? Far better is it, even for this life, than all worldly good. Kingdoms and thrones cannot compare with it. This is

> "A kingdom of immense delight,
> Where health and peace and joy unite;
> Where undeclining pleasures rise,
> And every want hath full supplies."

I ask again, then, will you strive to obtain it? Will all who cherish the hope of being a Christian resolve to make a faithful, constant, and persevering effort to secure this highest good? We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

In referring now to our departed friend, who we doubt not has gone to inherit the promises, we may remark that she set an example well worthy to be followed by all.

1. She was an example of *consistent* piety. She was far from being satisfied with a mere profession of attachment to Christ, or a mere name for piety. Religion was, with her, the great business of life, and to it she devoted her best energies. The most self-denying and cross-bearing duties were not neglected. She was unusually careful lest she should

bring some reproach upon the cause of Christ. She seemed ready, and willing, and anxious to perform every known duty. We may ask with unusual confidence, what obvious duty was she known to neglect? Her religious life was not characterized by a cold formality, but rather by intense feeling. Ask those who have seen and known most of her Christian life—who have witnessed her efforts to grow in grace, and increase in personal piety; her deep and anxious desires for the welfare of Zion; her mourning over its low estate; and her grief in view of the wanderer, the worlding, and the inconsistent professor. Ask those who have oft witnessed her religious conversation; who have seen at times her deep solicitude for the out-pouring of the Spirit, the revival of God's work, and the conversion of souls, and especially the youth of the flock. Ask those who have known the pleasure she felt in a preached gospel, and her earnest desire that all others might be profited thereby. Ask that praying circle who have sustained a regular meeting for prayer under her roof for more than a score of years; the response from all will be, that her's was a consistent piety.

2. Our departed friend was also an example of *ardent* and *devoted* piety.

There is a phase of Christian profession, which seems satisfied with a correct and irreproachable exterior, while it wants the zeal that prompts to active efforts, and the holy unction that indicates a soul in close and constant communion with God.

There may be this blameless outward deportment, without the shining face, that speaks of the mount of God, and the fires of holy love, kindled in the soul. But we do not recognize this as the portrait of our departed friend. Can we not all say, that she appeared, in some good degree, a zealous and devoted Christian? Instead of searching almost in vain for the fruits of the Spirit, her fruit appeared, "like clusters on the vine." Her ardor in religion appeared in her conversation; in her prayers; and in all her Christian efforts.

3. She was also an example of *Christian benevolence.*

She seemed to keep in mind the divine injunction, "to do good, and to communicate, forget not." With what readiness and cheerfulness did she meet the wants of the great objects of Christian benevolence! She loved to hear their claims presented, that her heart might be affected, and her mind instructed; and then she would open her hand to aid. Though her means were far overrated by those around her, yet she was foremost in every good work. And she was far from being ostentatious in her charities. Many have received from her timely aid, which was unknown to all others. In efforts to sustain the church and society; to sustain the gospel at home and abroad, all will bear testimony to her liberality.

4. She was truly an example of a *praying* Christian. Prayer was her "vital breath" and "native air."

With what regularity, and constancy, and interest this duty was performed, may be known to but few even in her own communion. Those who have known her communion with God in their praying circle, have felt that she was no stranger at the throne of grace. They have felt the favored influence of one who has dwelt in the secret place of the Most High, and witnessed an uncommon fervency in her supplications. Her *family altar* was constantly sustained. She felt its high importance. And even in the midst of infirmities and sufferings, she presented her daily offerings.

Her *closet* was a sacred and cherished place; and not only was it *daily* frequented, but it is not too much to say that many of her precious hours were spent there.

5. She was also an example of a sacred regard for *the holy Sabbath.*

She truly felt that it was a day of all others most *important*, because consecrated to most important purposes. It was a day she greatly loved. She loved its privileges and its blessings—its duties and its sacred pleasures. She guarded well against everything which would tend to profane it. It grieved her to see it profaned by others. She seemed to manifest much of the spirit of those holy women, who rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.

6. She was also an example of regular and constant attendance upon the Sanctuary.

We remember her as one of those who were always in their place in the Sanctuary, unless Providentially detained. She loved to see the house of God filled with devoted worshippers; and was often seen there when poorly able to endure the fatigue. We shall long remember her pious example. Her vacant seat will remind us of one who loved the gates of Zion.

It only remains that we now ask who will follow her as far as she was a follower of Christ? Upon whom shall her mantle rest? Who will be as watchful, and prayerful, as consistent and devoted? Who will be as benevolent, and as ready to sustain every good cause? Who will love the Sabbath as well, and keep it as holy; and who as diligently improve the privileges of the Sanctuary? Who will be as faithful and diligent a follower of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises?

TRIBUTARY LINES,

IN MEMORY OF

MRS. NANCY LAY,

OF WESTBROOK, CT.

WHO DIED MAY 25th, 1852,

In the 82nd year of her age.

The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be fat and flourishing. To show that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.—Ps. 92: 12–15.

This woman was full of good works, and alms-deeds which she did.—Acts 9: 36.

Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.—Prov. 31; 31.

Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them.—Rev. 15; 13.

Gone from the changing scenes of time,
The friend we loved so well;
Gone to that pure and blissful clime,
Where ransomed spirits dwell.

The spirit land! the spirit land!
There dwells our cherished one,
Amid the bright and shining band,
Who worship near the throne.

Long years of suffering she endured,
Ere life's frail lamp grew dim,
But faith in Christ her peace secured,
Her soul reposed on Him.

Brief was the anguish when her soul,
Passed from the earth away;
And reached its bright and heavenly goal,
Where shines eternal day.

She vanished like the rainbow hue,
That paints the summer sky;
Or like the transient morning dew,
When summer's suns are high.

A door in heaven was opened wide,
A voice said, "Hither come;"
Angelic messengers she spied;
And left her earthly home.

We miss her daily presence here,
But faith beholds her there;
Released from sin, and doubt, and fear,
And every earthly care.

In every dear, familiar spot,
Where she was wont to be;
We sadly feel that she "is not"—
But, Lord, she dwells with Thee.

We miss her from the fire-side, now,—
At morn and evening prayer;
When we around the altar bow,
Her place is vacant there.

From her deserted closet, now,
No more petitions rise;
Where she was daily wont to bow,
And converse with the skies.

Her pastor and the church will miss
Her constant, fervent prayer,
But think of her as high in bliss,
And hope her joys to share.

Within the sacred house of prayer,
There is a vacant place;
Oh! how she loved to worship there,
Before the throne of grace.

She dearly loved the sacred page,
And on it based her hope;
This nerved her in advancing age,
With pain and death to cope.

She never wished to injure those
Who aimed to do her ill;
She daily prayed for friends and foes,
And sought their welfare still.

The sick and poor have lost a friend,
Who loved their griefs to share;
And oft to them would tokens send,
Of kind and watchful care.

No more the hospitable feast
Her willing hands shall spread;
No more the faint and suffering guest
By her be warmed and fed.

The *children* miss her friendly smile,
The gift of book or toy;
And pious counsels which the while
Would oft her lips employ.

O! may her mantle on us rest,
Her spirit in our heart;
Ever abide to make us blest,
Till we from earth depart.

"Mother in Israel," sweetly sleep;—
Above thy peaceful bed,
Shall memory faithful vigils keep,
And tears of love be shed.

We ask to live and die like thee,
To share thy final rest;
Forever with our Lord to be,
In his embraces blest.

C. A. G.